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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/11/2016
TAGS: PGOV GB
SUBJECT: A RUMOR A DAY HELPS KEEP COUPS AWAY

REF: A. LIBREVILLE 231
 1B. LIBREVILLE 196
 1C. LIBREVILLE 217

Classified By: POLITICAL OFFICER GLENN FEDZER FOR REASON 1.4 (B)

11. (C) A document making the rounds in Libreville is asserting (again) that Ali Bongo tried to seize control of Gabon from his father, and will try again, by force if necessary. The document alleges that Ali, frustrated in his ambition to build a succession mechanism for himself into law, planned to poison his father and Senate President Georges Rawiri, but only succeeded in Rawiri's case. Rawiri died recently (Ref A), reportedly of a stroke. The document lists those who Ali plans to arrest after his father's death, including Ministers Jacques Adiahenot, Idriss Ngari, Paul Toungui, Casimir Oye Mba, as well as Presidential advisor Jean Pierre Lemboumba Lepandou and Generals Oleri, Ntori, and Oyini. General Oyini was removed recently from his position (Ref B) and an officer with less seniority was moved ahead of Ntori in the military chain of command (Ref C).

12. (C) COMMENT: Keeping with the tradition that good propaganda is built on a kernel of truth, recent changes in the military are widely believed to be attempts by Ali to secure his position for an eventual transition. The accusation that Ali has tried to or plans to assassinate his father, however, is not credible. More likely, the rumors are part of a smear campaign to publicly discredit Ali in advance of any succession. President Bongo's willingness to remove the head of the Republican Guard, which is not controlled by the Ministry of Defense, hints Ali has his father's support. It is possible opponents who believe Ali is favored by his father are taking advantage of Ali's relatively weak support in the streets to counter his growing power in the bureaucracy.

DHANANI